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Malaysian prime minister urges Muslims to unite against what he calls Jewish domination

Thursday, October 16, 2003
AP Breaking News

ROHAN SULLIVAN, Associated Press Writer

(10-16) 08:48 PDT PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia (AP) --

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad told a summit of Islamic leaders Thursday that "Jews rule the world by proxy" and the world's 1.3 billion Muslims should unite, using nonviolent means for a "final victory."

His speech at the Organization of the Islamic Conference summit, which he was hosting, drew criticism from Jewish leaders, who warned it could spark more violence against Jews.

Mahathir -- known for his outspoken, anti-Western rhetoric -- criticized what he described as Jewish domination of the world and Muslim nations' inability to adequately respond to it.

"The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million, but today the Jews rule the world by proxy," Mahathir said, opening the meeting of Islamic leaders from 57 nations. "They get others to fight and die for them."

Malaysia, a democratic nation that has a large non-Muslim population and does not enforce strict Islamic law, has long been a critic of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and of U.S. policy in the Middle East, including the war in Iraq and Washington's strong backing of the Jewish state.

Mahathir, 77, who is retiring Oct. 31, has used almost every international podium to lambaste the West for two decades, winning a reputation as an outspoken champion of Third World causes.

"For well over half a century, we have fought over Palestine. What have we achieved? Nothing. We are worse off than before," he said. "If we had paused to think, then we could have devised a plan, a strategy that can win us final victory."

The prime minister, who has turned his country into the world's 17th-ranked trading nation during his 22 years in power, said Jews "invented socialism, communism, human rights and democracy" to avoid persecution and gain control of the most powerful countries.

Mahathir added that "1.3 billion Muslims cannot be defeated by a few million Jews," but he suggested using political and economic tactics instead of violence.

He told the audience of sheiks, emirs, kings and presidents that Muslims had the world's richest civilization during Europe's Dark Ages, but disputes over dogma -- instead of embracing technology and science -- had left them weak and divided.

"Because we are discouraged from learning of science and mathematics as giving us no merit for the afterlife, today we have no capacity to produce our own weapons for our defense. We have to buy our weapons from our detractors and enemies," he said.

The leaders gave Mahathir a standing ovation afterward.

"I think it was a shrewd and very deep assessment of the situation," said Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher, without commenting on the remarks about the Jews. "I think he elaborated a program of action that is wide and very important. I hope the Islamic countries will be able to follow this very important road map."

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Jonathan Peled expressed disappointment in the remarks but said he wasn't surprised.

"It is not new that in such forums there is always an attempt to reach the lowest common denominator, which is Israel bashing," he said in Jerusalem. "But obviously we'd like to see more moderate and responsible kind of declarations coming out of such summits."

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, said Mahathir has used such statements in the past to prove he's tough on the West. But, he said, Thursday's speech was still worrisome.

"What is profoundly shocking and worrying is the venue of the speech, the audience and coming in the time we're living in," Cooper said in Jerusalem. "Mahathir's speech today is an

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absolute invitation for more hate crimes and terrorism against Jews. That's serious."

U.S. Ambassador to Malaysia Marie Huhtala declined to comment on Mahathir's speech.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, while not addressing Mahathir's comments on the Jews, said he supported his analysis, which also included steps for how Muslim nations can develop economically and socially.

"It is great to hear Prime Minister Mahathir speak so eloquently on the problems of the ummah (Muslim world) and ways to remedy them," Karzai said. "His speech was an eye-opener to a lot of us and that is what the Islamic world should do."

The summit is the first since the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks and comes at a time when many Muslims -- even U.S. allies -- feel the war on terrorism has become a war against them.

Leaders at the summit included Jordan's King Abdullah, Syrian President Bashar Assad, Morocco's King Mohammed VI, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo are attending as special observers because of their large Muslim minorities.

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